



Maricopa County Animal Care & Control Fact Sheet



Canine Distemper Virus

What is Canine Distemper Virus?

Canine Distemper is a virus that affects thousands of dogs in Maricopa County. It is a highly contagious virus that is often fatal but easy to prevent.

Who gets it?

Any unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated dog or puppy. Distemper can infect adults as readily as puppies.

How is it spread?

Distemper is transmitted from dog to dog by exposure to infected bodily fluids; saliva, urine, feces and nasal discharge. When a dog sneezes or coughs, virus particles are injected into the air. Any dog that breathes those particles may be infected. Any exposure to infected urine or feces may also cause infection.

What are the symptoms?

- Known as the "Great Pretender" because symptoms are often the same as other diseases such as infectious tracheobronchitis (kennel cough). Distemper has immunosuppressive effects making dogs susceptible to secondary bacterial infections especially pneumonia.
- After a dog is exposed to Distemper a transient fever may occur. The temperature will decrease to normal at 7-14 days. After which a second increase in body temperature may occur with conjunctivitis (eye discharge) and rhinitis (nasal discharge). These signs may be followed by coughing, diarrhea, vomiting, anorexia, dehydration, and weight loss with debilitation.
- Neurological signs may develop consisting of involuntary twitches of the muscles, "chewing gum" seizures, grand mal seizures, aggression, falling down, circling and vocalization as if in pain and death.

How do you diagnose it?

Incubation (onset of clinical signs) is 14-18 days. Often the dog is co-infected with other upper respiratory infections, making diagnosis difficult. Blood testing is only useful in dogs which have not been vaccinated. The presence of inclusion bodies constitutes a definitive diagnosis.

What is the treatment?

Distemper has a fatality rate of 50-90%. Animals can sometimes be saved if the disease is caught in the early stages.

There is no specific treatment for distemper in dogs.

Treatment may consist of broad-spectrum antibiotics to control secondary infections. IV fluids, electrolytes, and nutritional supplements for supportive care.

Antiviral drugs have shown some promise in the treatment of distemper in the early stages of the disease. Once central nervous system changes are evident, the prognosis is grave. Most animals who survive at this point will have lifelong effects such as epilepsy or chronic muscle twitching.

How do I prevent it?

- Distemper can be eradicated if everyone would vaccinate their pets. Puppies and compromised dogs should be kept away from unvaccinated animals until fully vaccinated. Puppies need a series of vaccinations beginning at 6 weeks of age and continuing every three to four weeks until the puppy is 16-18 weeks of age. Adult dogs should receive a booster vaccination on a regular basis. See your veterinarian for details.
- Be aware of your pet's behavior and if he shows any symptoms, bring him to a veterinarian immediately.
- Practice basic wellness and bring your pet to a veterinarian for a yearly exam.

How do I clean an infected area?

Distemper outside the host can be destroyed by heat, drying, detergents and disinfectants. Routine cleaning and disinfections procedures are effective in destroying Distemper on hard surfaces and inanimate objects. In warm environments Distemper usually doesn't persist once the dog is removed.

What is Maricopa County doing about the problem?

Maricopa County is committed to eradicating Distemper in our community. Maricopa County Animal Care & Control (AC&C) offers vaccinations to the public for \$10 at the following locations:

2323 S. 35th Ave (Phoenix), 5231 N. 35th Ave (Phoenix), 2630 W. 8th St. (Mesa). They also offer vaccination clinics in the community. Visit pets.maricopa.gov for locations and times. Anyone with questions about Distemper or vaccinations can call 602-506-7239.

For more information on animal care, behavior or AC&C programs contact (602) 506-PETS or visit pets.maricopa.gov